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FYI

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Pebble announces federal permit application

By Elizabeth Harball, Alaska's Energy Desk - Anchorage -

December 21, 2017

Map of the Bristol Bay region. The Pebble deposit location is indicated by the red box. (Photo courtesy U.S. EPA)

A controversial proposed mine in southwest Alaska is taking another significant step forward. Pebble Limited Partnership has announced that tomorrow, it will apply for a federal Clean Water Act permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

It's the first of many permit applications Pebble needs to file before it can build the proposed copper and gold mine. But it's still a triumph for its backers.

With this, Pebble will have checked off all three goals it wanted to accomplish this year: a settlement with the Environmental Protection Agency, a new partner and a permit application. Tom Collier is Pebble's CEO.

"We said we intended to accomplish all three of those this year and we think we've got the hat trick here, we think we got all three done and we're pretty pleased," said Pebble CEO Tom Collier.

The permit application triggers the federal environmental review process. Agencies will use that process to determine whether the mine should be approved. It also means more detailed plans on the mine's design will soon be made public.

Collier says he thinks this is a good thing.

"Now we're going to be able to have a debate about exactly what we're proposing to do," Collier said. "And I think that will be pretty healthy for resolving all the various disagreements about the project."

The Obama administration had proposed Clean Water Act restrictions on the Pebble mine before the standard permitting process could begin. That threw the mine's future into question. Back then, EPA said it was responding to widespread local concern that the mine could harm the Bristol Bay salmon fishery.

But after President Donald Trump took office, EPA announced a settlement with Pebble. That settlement invited the company to pursue permitting again.

Just this Monday, Pebble announced it secured a new partner for the mine — the Canadian company First Quantum Minerals.

Pebble's leadership says First Quantum Minerals' investment in the project will help fund it through the permitting process. Pebble hopes to complete the permitting process in three to five years.